

Reflection for Sunday 24th January 2021

Jesus calls: are we brave enough to hear it? Brave enough to be it?

Led by Gordon, with help from Maggie, and music performed by people from Orchardhill Parish Church (Giffnock), Brunswick Uniting Church (Melbourne, Australia), and our own Leslie McCracken.

Welcome

Good morning from a sunny Strathspey, and welcome to worship!

A time to gather round. A time to coorie in and keep cosy in the middle of a Highland winter. A time to be together, even though we can't be together in the way we might want. A time to dream, and open ourselves to God's dreams.

In this past week the world witnessed a new President in the United States of America, but it was the poetry of a 22 year-old woman that stole the show. Amanda Gorman's words were profound and set many a heart on fire as she painted a vision for a better America and a better world. And there, in the middle, she channelled that wonderful vision of the prophet Micah, where swords are beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks and where...

*Scripture tells us to envision
that everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree.
And no one shall make them afraid.
If we're to live up to our own time
then victory won't lie in the blade
but in all the bridges we've made.
That is the promised glade,
the hill we climb
if only we dare.*

From 'The Hill We Climb' by Amanda Gorman, performed at the Inauguration of the 46th President of the United States of America, 20 January 2021

Today, let's dare to dream and imagine. Let's dare to climb the mountain and to listen to God. Let's dare to hear, and then to act. Let's worship Him, knowing that worship changes us, for the better.

Hymn 510: Jesus calls us here to meet him

John L. Bell (b.1949) & Graham Maule (1958-2019)

Tune: 'Lewis Folk Melody' <https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/hymn/510-jesus-calls-us-here-to-meet-him>

arr. John L. Bell (b.1949)

1. Jesus calls us here to meet him
as, through word and song and prayer,
we affirm God's promised presence
where his people live and care.
Praise the God who keeps his promise;
praise the Son who calls us friends;
praise the Spirit who, among us,
to our hopes and fears attends.
2. Jesus calls us to confess him
Word of life and Lord of all,
sharer of our flesh and frailness,
saving all who fail or fall.
Tell his holy human story;
tell his tales that all may hear;
tell the world that Christ in glory
came to earth to meet us here.
3. Jesus calls us to each other,
vastly different though we are;
creed and colour, class and gender
neither limit nor debar.
Join the hand of friend and stranger;
join the hands of age and youth;
join the faithful and the doubter
in their common search for truth.

Words and music © WGRG, The Iona Community. Performed by David Fisher (piano) and Connor Going (voice) of Orchardhill Parish Church, Giffnock

A prayer to help us put God at the middle of all that we do

You, Jesus, call us to meet you here, and now.

Sitting in our cosy homes, hands wrapped around a warm mug, listening on our phones, or watching a screen, little islands of worship dotted about the place, it's easy to think that we're on our own. But

we're not. You are here. We are with you. We are united with all those who do this today....who gather because we have heard even the faintest whisper of your call.

We affirm your presence here. We sing of it. We dance in it (because no one can see us when we dance at home!). We praise you for all that you are: the God who keeps his promise, the Son who calls us friends, the Spirit who attends to our hopes and our fears, here, among us now....so much more than we can ever see or know, we praise you.

May we hear your call today. A call to come. A call to hear your story, and then tell it. A call to reach out to one another, friend and stranger. A call to meet you, and be changed.

Forgive us, oh sharer of our flesh and frailness. Know us inside out and help us to see all the bits we hide, even from ourselves. Too attracted by the lures of the world: money and position, comfort and security, stuff, and yet more stuff, and all of that often at the expense of others less fortunate.

May we know the grace of your abundant love as we stop and let you in once more. Warm our hearts so that we can know you in this moment, letting go our grasp of all that sullies, and open our hands to grasp new life, in you, and with each other.

And as we strain to hear your call, hear our whispered hopes and dreams as we say together old words of prayer that sum them all up....

Our Father in heaven hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Reading: Luke 5:1-11

Now Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing around him to hear the word of God. He saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then Jesus sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and lower your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing! But at your word I will lower the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets started to tear. So they motioned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they were about to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For Peter and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so were James and John, Zebedee's sons, who were Simon's business partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people!" So when they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Read by Maggie Dick from the New English Translation NET Bible® ©1996-2017 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. <http://netbible.com> All rights reserved.

Reflection

Simon, James, and John: the poor souls are pretty down in the mouth. And why wouldn't they be. After a long night doing what they're good at, they've come home empty handed and no doubt with the prospect of empty pockets and empty tummies (because this wasn't a pleasure trip they were on – this is their livelihood).

As the pandemic progresses, and the news oscillates from good to bad and back again on almost a daily basis, I get how they feel. I'm pretty gloomy at the moment, and I still have an income and a home. There are many others finding life much, much tougher. I reckon we can all identify with Simon, and James, and John.

It's into this moment of them reaching their limits and giving up that Jesus comes and asks a favour.

News has spread of him and what he's been saying and doing and now, wherever he goes, a crowd starts to form. Standing there at the shore, the obvious place to speak to them all, it seems, is out in the bay. So Jesus asks a favour of the dejected fisherman.

They could have said no, and the whole story would have stopped there and then. But there seems to be something hard to resist about this man. Hard to resist, and impossible to ignore.

From talking to the crowd, Jesus turns the conversation to the three men and their work. A day-to-day conversation, one step on from "how are you?" Simon's world of work becomes the focus, and, before he knows it, the conversation is hooked in Simon.

What starts off as a favour quickly turns into an abundance of fish, and a choice for Simon. He could cash in the catch, as I guess he must have initially decided to do when he called for the other boat to help. After all, this will more than make up for last night's long waste of time and money. He could choose to say in the boat and do what he knows. Or, he can tune in to the deeper call...the deeper question.

Old life, or new life? Which is it to be? The living Word of God comes crashing into his life with abundance. But the Word doesn't just need heard. It needs heeded, and there's Simon's choice.

The abundance of fish point to an abundance of life. Hearing, it seems, is not enough to find real life. That life needs to be lived. The Word needs to be lived.

What's wonderful about this story is the ordinariness that Jesus talks into. What starts with a small request and an almost innocuous favour, turns into a conversation about life and work, that turns into a miracle and a life completely changed. A gentle nothing turns into a massive something.

And what even more wonderful, but also terrifying, is that it asks questions of us. Jesus, still, today, is asking questions of us.

Can we let God's word cut through the noise and actually speak?

Do we hear it?

Do we want to hear it, knowing that to hear it means that it must change us?

Are we willing to give up whatever our current sense of abundance might be, for God's abundance?

A conversation is what takes Simon from safe, predictable and routine into new ground, new depths and new challenges.

In the world that we all have a chance in building, especially when so much is now up for grabs, do we hear this story today and recognise the importance....the imperative on us to be agents for change and for the better?

God's words keeps on coming. Through time, and glimpsed in the stories from scripture, God keeps declaring powerful words. God's living word proved impossible for Simon to ignore and the way he lived his life completely changed. Past, present, future, God continues to faithfully free us from our nets, if we'll dare to hear and be brave enough to act.

Hymn: Hail the fishermen long ago

Dave Brown

Tune: 'Hail The Fisherfolk' <https://soundcloud.com/bucpost/hail-the-fisherfolk?in=bucpost/sets/tune-in>

Dave Brown (additional arrangement Chris Lees)

1. Hail the fishermen long ago who took their chances on the road.
Bet their futures not lived yet and cast aside their fishing nets.
The fishermen.
2. Hail the women of Galilee, who stood beside a brooding sea.
Watched it all and cried the end and were the first to start again.
Hail the women.
3. Hail the slaves and the broken ones who turned their hearts to the kingdom come.
Wove their drama into song and leapt for joy when he came along.
The broken ones.

4. Hail the ones who left us young, when their life had just begun.
Pure as innocence can be and we bless their memory.
All hail the young.
5. Hail the saints and martyrs here, in lands and lifetimes through the years.
Prayer and action, joy and tears who left a trail to walk through fear.
The martyrs here.
6. Hail the old and hail the wise, who know the myst'ry of our lives.
Watch the sunset, touch the rain and lose their life to be regained.
All hail the aged.
7. Hail the fisherfolk of today, who hear the call and live the way.
Beside God to make a stand for truth and mercy in this land.
The fisherfolk.

© 2006 Dave Brown. Performed by members and friends of Brunswick Uniting Church, Melbourne, Australia.

Reflection

The account of Simon's call could have stalled at any point. He could have said no right at the beginning and gone home to get some well earned rest. He could have been fed up of sishing and not engaged with the conversation with Jesus. He could have laughed at the joiner's suggestion to try fishing in a different place – after all, *he's* the fisherman with all the years of experience, not Jesus! He could have taken the money and gone back to his day-to-day life – thanks for your help, Jesus.

All the way along, God's living word speaks quietly, but powerfully, laying the choice down for Simon to take.

And that choice is there for us, too. A choice to move beyond simply hearing to acting. Are we brave enough?

Over the coming weeks, we'll highlight some calls to action that might inspire you. Calls to action that are on my heart at the moment that might speak into yours as well.

And this week it is climate action. Over this coming year, we'll be looking more and more at this most urgent of calls, especially as COP26 comes to our very own doorsteps in Glasgow in November.

The Climate Colation is a group of over 170 charities and organisations calling us all to listen and act, and their Show the Love campaign each February is a way of engaging, and inspiring others to engage. From talking to friends, to writing to politicians, to making pledges to changes in lifestyle, we're all called to take part. Our own community here in the strath is leading the way for us all. Sustainable Strathspey are a local action group and they have arranged for a powerful display to be created in the window of the YMCA throughout February, where little green hearts can be made by each of us and put on show.

Over on the website, I'll put up links to a variety of craft options for you to make your own, along with places to go to find out more, and links to postcards that you can send to MPs and MSPs. You can pop in your green heart to the YMCA at 10am on 1st February, or any time to Fiona's Wholefoods and Refills shop that is open there Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

It's only a little something, but it might be world changing. God's call to love goes way beyond words in all sorts of ways. Perhaps this is one of them?

Prayer for ourselves and others

Adapted from a prayer in Spill the Beans, vol.21, p.79 © 2016 Spill the Beans Resource Team

God who is out beyond us yet right beside us, shaping the world through times you've never seen before into a future you are only shaping now. May we follow with the faith to believe that love is the way to recreate the world,
peace is the way to defeat conflict,
welcome is the way to transform prejudice.

In our planet's environment may we be with you to bless it with rest from cynicism and love it with

tender care again: taking the world's side rather than our own, increasing the breathing of the planet rather than increasing our economy with no heed to the cost. May we follow you into the world's healing. Hear us.

In the conflicts of our world and our neighbourhoods may we be with you to bless them with rest from fear and love them again with welcoming and friendship, taking the gospel's side and inviting fellowship between enemy and stranger.

In the week that the international Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons came into force, we join with all those from across the Christian churches, and across the faiths, who pray for peace and disarmament, praying that our leaders will heed the call to let go of fear and hate.

May we follow you into our world's healing and the reconciliation of neighbourhoods. Hear us.

In the living of our lives and in our friendships and family may we be with you to bless them with love beyond what we can give and love those closest to us,

those ill and recovering,

those anxious and worried,

those for whom Covid-19 is a real and present danger, struggling for breath or wondering how to make ends meet,

those needing time for healing,

May we follow you into that healing. Hear us. Call us. Work in us and through us, in your name, Living Word of God. Amen.

Hymn: You walk along our shoreline

Sylvia G. Dunstan (1955-1993)

Tune: 'Wie lieblich ist der Maien' <https://hymnary.org/media/fetch/152609>

Johann Steurlein (1546-1613)

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| 1. You walk along our shoreline
when land meets unknown sea.
We hear your voice of power,
"now come and follow me.
And if you still will follow
through storm and wave and shoal,
then I will make you fishers,
but of the human soul." | 2. You call us, Christ, to gather
the people of the earth.
We cannot fish for only
those lives we think have worth.
We spread your net of gospel
across the water's face,
our boat a common shelter
for all found by your grace. | 3. We cast our net, O Jesus;
we cry the kingdom's name;
we work for love and justice;
we learn to hope through pain.
You call us, Lord, to gather
God's daughters and God's sons,
to let your judgment heal us
so that all may be one. |
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Blessing

In the words of Amanda Gorman....

*When day comes we step out of the shade,
aflame and unafraid.*

The new dawn blooms as we free it.

For there is always light,

if only we're brave enough to see it.

If only we're brave enough to be it.

From 'The Hill We Climb' by Amanda Gorman, performed at the Inauguration of the 46th President of the USA, 20/01/21

May the blessing of ears to hear and hearts that feel be ours today.

May the blessing of bravery, brave enough to see God's light and braver still to be it for others, be ours, this day, and always. Amen.

Sending song, hymn 803: We will walk with God

Swaziland traditional hymn

Tune: 'Sizohamba Naye' <https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/hymn/803-we-will-walk-with-god-my-brothers>

Swaziland traditional hymn

We will walk with God, my brothers, we will walk with God.

We will walk with God, my sisters, we will walk with God.

We will go rejoicing till the kingdom has come.

We will go rejoicing till the kingdom has come.

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